

FRANK READE



WEEKLY MAGAZINE,

Containing Stories of Adventures on Land, Sea & in the Air.

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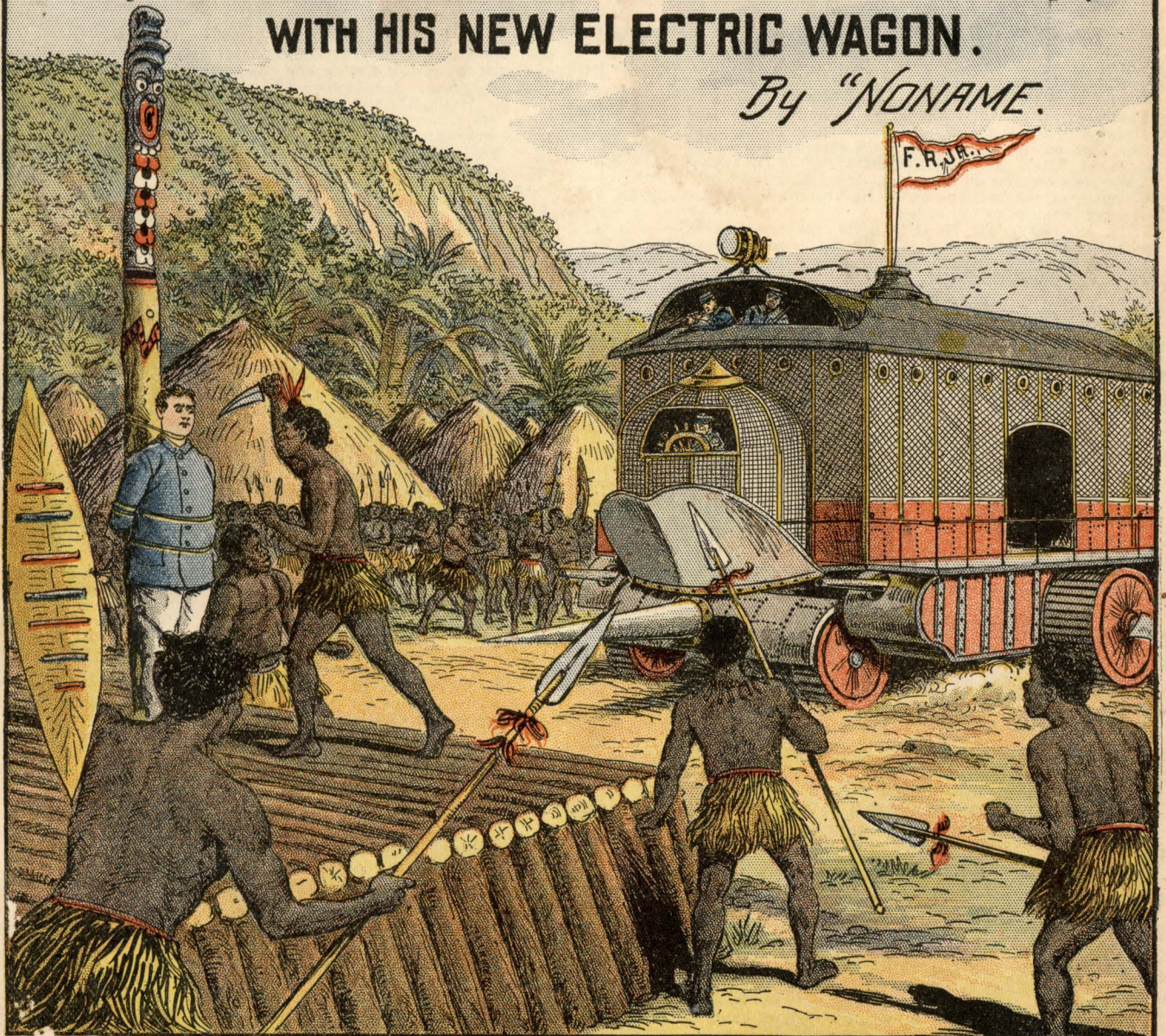
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NEW YORK, MAY 22, 1903.

Price 5 Cents.

ADRIFT IN AFRICA; OR, FRANK READE, JR., AMONG THE IVORY HUNTERS, WITH HIS NEW ELECTRIC WAGON.

By "NONAME."



The Celt seized his rifle and sprang to a forward loophole. It was certain that the superstitious fiends meant to kill Hal. The executioner, with his knife, stood over the youth. Already the knife was in the air. Barney muttered a prayer and pulled the trigger.

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(Continued on page 3 of cover.)

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Adrift in Africa;

OR,

FRANK READE, JR., AMONG THE IVORY HUNTERS
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CHAPTER I.

AN AFRICAN LEGACY.

"A hill of ivory, did you say?"

"Even so."

"Mercy! that is fortunate to the one who can recover it."

"Certainly; but there is the hitch. It is not easy to penetrate the deepest and darkest wilds of Africa and bring out even such a treasure as that."

"I believe you are right. If there was only a way there would be no further need of our slaving away at this dog's life."

The speakers were two young men, cousins as it were, named Hal Martin and Jack Fuller.

The scene was a dingy little office in Newspaper Row in the city of New York. Upon the door was a sign:

MARTIN & FULLER,

STENOGRAPHERS AND TYPEWRITERS.

Hard-working, industrious young men they were, of sterling principles and honesty. Their patronage was fairly

lucrative, but like all small professions, yielded no near approach to the possibility of a fortune.

For three years they had delved and dug in their small mine of industry.

But every day they grew more and more dissatisfied with their lot, and as is customary with youthful minds, meditated a change for the better.

Thus matters were when one day, in exploring his effects, Hal found a rather verbose and lengthy letter from his uncle, who had been traveling for years in Central Africa.

Col. James Martin had left America fifteen years previous, and had written to Hal at various intervals until within a period of five years, since which time Hal had heard nothing from him.

The young stenographer had given his wandering relative up for dead long ago.

The letter in question very vividly described an exploring trip into the interior, and the discovery of a gigantic pile of elephants' tusks, heaped up for years by an extinct race of natives.

The ivory was stated to be of first quality, and owing to the equable climate, perfectly preserved.

It represented an immense fortune, lacking only transportation to the coast to find a speedy sale.

But also, Col. Martin had told of a very savage tribe of natives nearby, who were disposed to regard the ivory heap as sacred, and were very hostile to visitors.

"This in itself," wrote the colonel, "would preclude any possibility of carrying the ivory away easily. Yet a small army of determined white men could no doubt secure it."

At the time of receiving the letter, Hal had regarded the ivory treasure as something wholly impracticable in view of many easier ways of making his fortune.

But his plans did not pan out as expected. It was not so easy to carve his way to affluence as he believed.

And now, upon coming across this letter of his uncle's, it was not at all strange that he should be suddenly fired with the desire to attempt the recovery of the ivory.

So he had shown the letter to his partner, handsome Jack Fuller.

The latter was instantly enthused.

"Wonderful!" he cried. "If that ivory hill could be found, we would be dead sure of a fortune. Indeed, I should rather enjoy a season of wild adventure and roughing it in Central Africa."

"It would be better than working a typewriter forever," ventured Hal.

"I guess it would. I say, Hal!"

"Well?"

"Let us try it."

"Throw up our business here?"

"Yes."

The two young men looked at each other.

"How would we ever get there?"

"Any way at all. Work our passage on a sailing vessel. Any way will do."

"Wait a moment," said Hal, with a sudden thrill of inspiration. "I have an idea."

He picked up the morning paper and indicated a paragraph. Thus it read:

"It is rumored that the famous inventor of many wonderful machines, Mr. Frank Reade, Jr., of Readestown, has completed his new machine, the Electric Wagon, and will shortly start on an exploring tour through Central Africa. The confirmation of this report is awaited with deep interest."

"Now, I went to college with Frank Reade, Jr.," declared Hal, "and we were warm friends. I feel sure that I can enlist his sympathy in our cause."

"Hurrah!" cried Jack Fuller, eagerly; "that is certainly our chance. You are sure we can induce him to help us?"

"I think so."

"That will assure our success."

"You see he is going to Central Africa, and if we can only induce him to allow us to go with him, we will be all right. We have no money with which to employ armed men, and with Mr. Reade's machine to aid us we can easily carry off the ivory."

"Just so! They say he has perfected a new dynamite gun, which will blow anything to pieces."

"Then it is settled!" cried Hal, with inspiration. "I will take the next train to Readestown and see Frank. There is anybody in the world who can gain his co-operation. I think I am the one."

"Good for you, Hal!" cried Jack, with feverish interest. "and may you have success. Hurrah! Only think, we may soon be off for Central Africa."

"Wait until I return from Readestown."

And this ended the colloquy. Events now succeeded each other rapidly.

Readestown, the home of Frank Reade, Jr., the inventor, was a beautiful little city, founded by Frank's ancestor and where many generations of Reades had dwelt.

The large machine shops were the property of the young inventor, and devoted wholly to the manufacture of his inventions.

It was true that Frank had just completed his new Electric Wagon.

This was a triumph of inventive art, and that the reader may more readily comprehend it, let us describe it in detail.

Frank had long had a desire to explore certain parts of Central Africa.

This had led to the construction of the Electric Wagon.

He knew that a wagon, safe for travel in such a wild part of the world, must be strong both for offense and defense. Battles with wild, bloodthirsty natives, and savage wild beasts, would be a moral certainty.

The Electric Wagon, therefore, was constructed as a small arsenal of deadly weapons.

In shape it resembled a long wagon, with deep body of plated steel, impervious to a rifle ball.

Four wheels with grooved rubber tires supported the running work of the strongest and yet the lightest kind.

Heavy fenders hung over the wheels, and a dasher rose in front. Back of this was a pilot-house or cover for the steersman, of thick and stout steel netting, with a heavy plate glass window in front.

The main body of the wagon rising above the deck was of steel netting, supported at the corners by strong posts. Midway there was an arched opening or passage, extending from one side to the other.

In the netting were round loopholes for the use of riflemen.

Along each side was a hand rail, protecting a shelf or small balcony. In the rear was a similar one.

Upon the dome or roof of the machine was a mammoth searchlight of most intense power, and capable of penetrating a great wall of darkness.

But the most important fixtures of all were the two electric guns, one on each side of the machine and pointing through portholes in the steel body of the wagon.

These deadly engines of warfare were the particular invention of Frank Reade, Jr., and were very light, being made of tough, thinly rolled steel, and fired by means of electric pressure.

The projectile thrown was a dynamite cartridge, which exploded with the impact, with fearful execution.

So much for the exterior of the Electric Wagon.

The interior, though different, was none the less wonderful in the matter of marvelous symmetry and appointment.

In the main body or hold of the wagon was the electric dynamo room, where power was manufactured to propel the machine.

This was a revelation of delicate and intricate machinery. Here, also, were the gun-rooms, the storage compartment, and the cooking galley.

Above this was the main deck of the wagon, and here was the upper cabin, with its delicately furnished salon and the staterooms, six in number, for passengers.

Provisions and supplies of all kinds were stored aboard the Electric Wagon, and she was ready for a grand tour.

Truly, of all the wonderful mechanical conceptions of modern times, the Electric Wagon seemed the peer.

And of all the people interested in the new invention, there were two people, perhaps, more enthusiastic than any others.

One of these was a negro named Pomp, a jolly, whole-hearted ducky, whose only blemish was a black skin.

The other was a lively, rollicking and fun-loving Irishman named Barney O'Shea.

Barney and Pomp had been with Frank Reade, Jr., upon his many wonderful voyages around the world.

Indeed, the young inventor could ill have spared his two steady companions. Both were fearless, prompt and true, and deeply devoted to him.

They were both delighted with the new invention.

"Begorra, naygur," cried Barney, addressing Pomp, "yez will be travelin' troo the land av yer nativity in foine style, won't yez? Shure, yez own countrymen won't know yez."

Barney was always nagging Pomp, and the ducky was quite capable of retaliating in good style.

"Huh!" said Pomp, quickly, "yo' don' need to say nuffin' 'bout ancestors, I'ish. If yo' was to trammel froo yo' native country dey would take yo' fo' an English dude."

This was to Barney like flaunting a red flag in the face of a mad bull.

If there was anything in the world the free-hearted Celt disliked, it was an allusion likening him to that race whom he fancied the oppressors of his people.

"Whurroo!" he cried, "don't yez be afther loikenin' me to anything English. Shure it's moighty little loikeness there is atwixt the Oirish an' the English, bad cess to 'em!"

"Den I gib yo' to understan' dat a 'Merican ducky ain't no mo' related to de brack man ob Afriky," returned Pomp.

Barney saw that Pomp had the best of the argument, and with fairness replied:

"Yez are roight, naygur," he agreed. "Shure, yez are a black man wid a white man's heart, an' it's friends we have allus been and allus will be."

Then they shook hands with the best of grace. It was likely that Barney would have proposed as a sealing of good will a drop of the "crather," but at that moment Frank Reade, Jr., himself appeared upon the scene.

CHAPTER II.

THE INTERVIEW.

The foregoing colloquy had taken place in the big high-roofed storage-room of the machine works.

Upon iron horses near sat the body of the Electric Wagon. It needed only the adjustment of the wheels to be ready for a start. A few hours' work would do this.

The moment Frank Reade, Jr., appeared Barney and Pomp doffed their caps in a hearty manner.

"Top av the mornin' to yez!" cried Barney.

"Good-mornin', Marse Frank," said Pomp.

"Good-morning," replied Frank, pleasantly. "I have good news."

"Yez don't say!" cried Barney.

"Wha' am it, Marse Frank?"

"I have closed negotiations with the captain of the Sierra Leone. He will take us with the wagon aboard his steamer and land us at any part of the African coast we may desire."

"Hooray!" cried Barney and Pomp in chorus.

"We shall start within two days. Be sure to have everything ready."

"We'll jes' do dat, sah."

"But this is not all the news I have for you. I have received a telegram from New York to the effect that a young man by the name of Hal Martin is coming to see me about a very important mission in Africa."

"Am dat so?" exclaimed Pomp.

"Bejabers, phwat can it be, Misther Frank?" asked Barney.

"Indeed, I have not the slightest idea," replied Frank. "However, if it is a matter of charity or philanthropy, which we can perform for the benefit of suffering humanity, I shall be very glad to do so."

Barney and Pomp had orders to get the machine ready for placing on board the steamer Sierra Leone.

They went about it at once, while Frank returned to his office.

He had barely seated himself at his desk for the purpose of attending to some correspondence, when Pomp thrust his head in at the door.

"Marse Frank!"

"Well?" said Frank, turning about.

"Dar am a young man out yer as says he wants to speak wif yo'. Here am his card."

Frank glanced at the name on the card.

HAL MARTIN,
New York.

"Show the young man in, Pomp," he said. "I will see him."

With this the darky vanished.

A few moments later the door opened and a young man, tall and handsome, stood on the threshold.

He bowed politely and said:

"Is this Mr. Frank Reade, Jr.?"

"It is," replied Frank. "What can I do for you?"

"Doubtless you remember a telegram received from me this morning?"

"I do," replied Frank. "Please walk in and have a seat."

Hal Martin seated himself opposite the famous inventor.

"I will not consume any more of your valuable time than possible, Mr. Reade," he said. "I heard that you were about to depart for Central Africa with your Electric Wagon, and I thought I would try and see you before you went upon a very important subject."

"Indeed!" said Frank, studying the face of the youth before him closely. "What may it be?"

He was at once very favorably impressed with the frank manners of his young visitor, and his honest, handsome face.

"The matter concerns the location of a vast fortune which I have the description and the clew," continued Hal.

"Well?" exclaimed Frank, much interested. "A fortune, you say?"

"Yes."

"And it is in Central Africa?"

"It is."

"And you want me to look it up for you?"

"Well," stammered Hal. "I thought perhaps I could induce you to help us recover it."

"Us? Who is the other party?"

"My partner—Jack Fuller."

"Well, I am, indeed, interested," said Frank. "Of what does this lost treasure consist?"

"Of many thousands of pounds of the finest ivory which awaits only effective transportation to the coast."

"Ivory?"

"Yes."

Frank Reade, Jr., was astonished.

"I know that ivory is a very valuable article," he said "but I could not agree to use my machine for that purpose."

"Ah, that I do not ask," replied Hal, hastily.

"Indeed!"

"Oh, no. Simply your assistance in holding at bay a race or tribe of African natives who regard the ivory as sacred and will not consent to its being carried away."

Frank Reade, Jr.'s face changed.

"That is different," he declared. "But from what source do you get information of the existence of so much ivory?"

"From my uncle, Col. James Martin, who is a noted African explorer."

"Indeed! His name is familiar to me," said Frank. "I have heard much of him. Then Col. Martin is your uncle?"

"If he is alive, yes."

"Do you believe him dead?"

"That I do not know. Indeed, it will be one of the objects of my visit to Africa to find my uncle."

"In which I hope you will be successful," replied Frank warmly. "You have claimed my deepest interest, Mr. Martin."

"And you will help us?" cried Hal, excitedly.

"I will."

"Oh, thank you a thousand times!"

Hal was completely overjoyed. He wanted to telegraph Jack at once, but Frank Reade, Jr., said:

"How do you expect to get to Africa?"

"Ah, that is something we have not provided for yet!" said Hal, dubiously. "It will take all our savings."

"Then I think I can help you out," said Frank. "My negotiations with Captain Baxter of the Sierra Leone are to the effect that the Electric Wagon with crew, shall be transported to any point upon the coast of Africa for a certain sum. You may go aboard and pass as the members of the crew, if you choose. This will give you absolutely free passage."

Hal impulsively grasped Frank's hand.

"Heaven bless you!" he cried. "You are indeed a friend to us. That kindness will certainly assure us success in our undertaking."

"I believe you will succeed," said Frank. "I will help you all I can."

"Thank you. I will go now and wire Jack the good news. But when shall we start for the African coast?"

"In two days," replied Frank. "Be sure to be all ready by day after to-morrow. Make all personal preparations by that time."

"I will do it," replied Hal. "Until then au revoir."

With this he hastily left the machine works. He went at once and wired Jack.

"We are to go along with Frank Reade, Jr. Shut up shop and come along at once."

The moment Jack Fuller received that message he was delirious with delight. He hastily made preparations.

It did not take the two youths long to get ready.

At the appointed time they were in Readestown, and ready for the start.

The Electric Wagon was in sections, neatly boxed, and placed aboard the Sierra Leone in New York harbor.

Meanwhile the news of Frank Reade, Jr.'s proposed trip to Africa had spread all over the country.

From far and near people flocked to offer the young inventor congratulations and wishes for success.

Frank thanked them all. Then one day all of the African exploring party stood on the deck of the Sierra Leone as it lay at anchor in the North River.

The Electric Wagon was packed safely away down in the hold.

The Sierra Leone was a fruiting steamer and a stanch, rapid-sailing little craft. Her captain was a genial, honest man.

The start was made. America's shores were left behind and the little steamer was soon battling with the sea.

Frank had planned for a landing in the vicinity of Cape Lopez in Lower Guinea. From thence he meant to penetrate into the unexplored regions of the Dark Continent.

The voyage was a singularly propitious one.

In due time, after some weeks in buffeting with the seas and head winds, the islands of St. Thomas were sighted.

Cape Lopez was south of these and the Sierra Leone kept that course until finally the main land burst into view.

The voyagers gazed upon the coast of Africa with emotions of a varied sort.

They were about to enter upon a wonderful and thrilling trip through a veritable wonderland such as had a counterpart in no other part of the world.

A small harbor was found, and in this the steamer dropped anchor.

The shores near at hand presented a picturesque appearance.

There were waving palms and flowering plants of the richest and most exotic kind. High cliffs of basaltic rock rose at intervals as a barrier against the sea.

This was the point chosen by Frank Reade, Jr., for the disembarkation.

The floats upon which the wagon was to be taken ashore were lowered. While this was being done, Frank decided to take a trip ashore.

He was anxious to climb the high cliffs and see something of the country beyond.

Reaching the shore, Frank led the way up the cliffs.

On attaining the summit a wonderful sight was spread to view inland.

As far as the eye could reach, all was a vast tract of country consisting of rolling, grass-covered plains, dense jungles, deep woods and slowly flowing rivers.

A wilder or more picturesque tract could hardly be imagined.

Far beyond the horizon was visible mighty mountain chains. Over all hung that indescribable gloom or haze, which has given to Africa the fitting name of the Dark Continent.

The transportation ashore of the Electric Wagon was a task of no slight sort. But it was accomplished, and finally all the various parts of the machine were piled upon the beach.

The next thing was to get it to the summit of the cliff above.

Luckily a wide path was found, up which Frank believed he could cause the wagon to climb.

The next thing was to put the machine together.

This required the work of a day, and when completed, the Electric Wagon was ready for work and travel.

Then, by dint of much effort, Frank managed to get it to the summit of the cliff above.

All the effects of the travelers and the supplies and equipments of the wagon were next brought ashore.

Then all was ready for the start.

"Captain Baxter," said Frank, as he shook hands in farewell with the steamer's captain, "we will expect to meet you here upon this spot six months later."

CHAPTER III.

THE LION HUNT.

The captain nodded and replied:

"That will be the 25th of November, I believe."

"Exactly."

"If I am not here just on that date wait awhile, for I may not be able to weather the Cape."

"I will do so," replied Frank.

Then the sailors returned to the ship, and a salute was fired from the Sierra Leone's two guns. The steamer weighed anchor and stood out of the little harbor.

The explorers from the cliff watched her out of sight.

Then Frank Reade, Jr., cried:

"Come, boys, all aboard! We must improve time."

All clambered aboard the wagon and Frank started the machinery.

Barney took up his post in the pilot-house, and held a course due eastward over the spreading plain.

Hal Martin and Jack Fuller, now fully imbued with the spirit of the occasion, stood on the deck and watched the country fly past as the Electric Wagon sped on.

"This is a rare experience!" cried Hal. "We are in the wonderful land of the negro!"

"And the cannibal!" rejoined Jack, with a laugh.

"Yes; a few of the African tribes are cannibalistic," said Frank Reade, Jr., "but I think we need fear little from them if we only keep out of their clutches."

"I am sure I shall be very careful to do that," said Jack, emphatically.

"How long will it take us to get into the heart of Equatorial Africa?" asked Hal.

"Perhaps a week," replied Frank. "It will depend much upon the obstacles we meet."

"Ah, let us hope they will be few!"

"We are now in what is known as the French Congo State. Due west from here is the Congo River, and that is the boundary line between the French possessions and the Congo Free State. Southeast from here in the land of the Kassongos is the locality where your uncle discovered the hill of ivory."

"Yet ivory exists all through this Congo country," said Hal.

"Very true. It is obtained mostly by barter with the chiefs of the natives tribes."

"No doubt we may meet with some of the ivory traders."

"No doubt whatever. The worst thing we shall meet with, however, is the slave traders. We must regard them as natural enemies."

"That will be an opportunity for a petty warfare!" cried Jack.

"Yes," replied Frank, "for in every instance I meet I shall do my utmost to release any slaves we may come across."

"Who or what class are generally engaged in that nefarious calling?" asked Hal.

"The Portuguese, I believe. They are a treacherous and soulless class of villains."

For some hours the Electric Wagon kept on into the interior.

Of course it was necessary to select the smoothest of traveling, and fortunately the character of the country admitted of this.

It was low and level, and the wagon was possessed of scythe-like knives, which could be put upon the axles, and which easily cut a way through the deep grass.

Thus the travelers got along famously.

But at every step evidence was furnished that they were in a wild and uninhabited part of the world.

Wild beasts and reptiles were plenty.

Upon the plain the antelope roamed in great numbers. In the bottom lands the buffalo and occasionally a band of hyenas were frightened from their hideous orgies.

Then serpents crawled into the deep grass, lizards and alligators swam in the shallow rivers.

Nightfall came at last.

They had covered fully a hundred miles that day.

Frank decided to make a stop, for he did not believe it possible to travel after dark, though with the aid of the searchlight this might have been attempted.

So a spot was selected right in the verge of a dense jungle.

Here it was believed that the night could be passed quietly.

The day had been excessively warm.

The crew of the Electric Wagon had lounged about in white duck suits and light cork hats.

But with the shutting down of night a cool air sprang up seemingly from the earth, and so delightful was it than none of the party could at once think of retiring.

The party sat out upon the outer deck or balcony of the machine.

Pomp descended into the cabin and brought up his banjo. The darky was an adept with this, and was rich in knowledge of old plantation songs.

He entertained the company for some time, and then Barney appeared upon the scene.

Under his arm he carried an antediluvian fiddle. At once he began to make it groan.

"Mebbe yez think the naygur is the only musician on board!" he cried. "Wait until I play yez Garry Owen!"

And his listeners were charmed, for Barney rendered some sweet old Irish airs in his rollicking way.

Thus the hours passed until finally all concluded to turn in.

It was arranged that Barney should watch the first half of the night, and Pomp the latter half.

The darkness was of a Stygian quality.

Nothing could be seen ten feet away from the machine without the aid of the electric lights.

These were turned on, however, and Barney took up his station forward of the pilot-house.

"Bejabers, I don't wondher they call it the Dark Continent," he muttered. "Shure, it's blacker than Danny McGuire's hat."

However, the Celt lit his pipe and puffed away at it cheerily while he scanned the dark shadows about.

Time passed slowly.

It was near the hour of midnight when Barney was nearly precipitated from his seat by a fearful noise.

It seemed to come really from beneath the wagon.

At first it seemed to Barney as if the universe was tumbling to pieces, so fearful was the noise in its intonations.

But almost immediately he recognized it, and his sensations can be imagined as he saw glaring at him from the jungle depths a pair of eyeballs that seemed like veritable balls of fire.

"Begorra, it's a lion!" gasped the Celt in terror. "Shure, it's not any close acquaintance I'm afther wantin' wid him!"

He stood a moment in indecision whether to fire a shot at the monster or not, when another roar, this time in his rear, caused him to give a fearful start.

"Howly smoke!" he gasped. "Phwat the divil is that? Another av the omadhauns, as I'm a livin' sinner!"

This was true.

Two of the monarchs of the jungle had appeared upon

the scene. Doubtless they had been attracted by the scent and the electric lights.

Barney hesitated no longer.

He threw his rifle to his shoulder.

Crack!

The bullet must have gone true to the mark, judging from the after effects. There was a terrific crash in the jungle, the sound of a thrashing body and an awful roar.

Then something like a thunderbolt struck the wagon.

There was a terrific shaking of the steel netting, and Barney was astounded to see against the sky one of the lions clinging to the roof of the wagon.

This was enough for the Celt.

He yelled with all his might:

"Misther Frank! All av yez. Come up as quick as iver ye kin!"

But there was little heed for the call.

The voyagers had heard the fearful racket and were already climbing out of their quarters.

Frank was the first to appear.

"What on earth is the matter, Barney?" he cried.

"Shure, can yez see for yersilf?" replied the Celt.

"A lion!" cried Frank, as he glanced up at the huge beast vainly trying to claw its way through the netting.

Hal and Jack were now upon the scene.

Pomp also appeared.

Barney had turned a focus of the electric light upon the lion.

It for a moment blinded the beast, but it did not cause him to relax his efforts to claw a way through the netting.

"Jewhittaker!" gasped Jack Fuller; "he is a royal one, isn't he? How can you ever reach him?"

This was a question.

Of course a bullet could not reach him, for he was on the other side of the netting.

Neither could a line be drawn upon him through any of the portholes.

While he might not succeed in doing any damage to the netting, yet Frank realized that it would be better to rid the structure of its gigantic incubus.

So he adopted what was an ingenious and the best method.

From the cabin he brought a wire, and donned some insulated gloves. These enabled him to handle a "live" wire with impunity.

The other end of the wire was connected with the dynamo.

Then the current was turned on.

"Everybody keep away from the netting!" cried Frank, warningly.

All stood upon the wooden part of the deck, which was a non-conductor. Then Frank touched the netting just under the lion's body.

The result was thrilling.

The monster uttered a terrific roar and tumbled off the netting to the ground. A lightning-like streak had seemed to traverse his whole body.

He lay upon the ground quite still.

The current was shut off, and then the electric light focussed upon the prostrate beast.

"He is dead!" cried Hal.

"Yes," said Frank. "He will never trouble us more."

There was no more sleep for the voyagers that night.

The excitement of killing the lion was sufficient to banish the drowsy god. All remained on deck until morning.

No more wild beasts, however, showed up, and no incident worthy of note occurred.

But examination in daylight showed that Barney's shot in the dark had been a good one.

It had penetrated the lion's eye and his brain, and he lay dead in the deep grasses.

Two lions in one night was royal game, and the voyagers all felt well satisfied.

But the wagon had not proceeded twenty miles further on its journey that morning when Frank Reade, Jr., who was forward on the dasher, turned and shouted to Barney in the pilot-house:

"Hold up, Barney!"

The Celt instantly swung the electric lever over and brought the wagon to a stop just in the verge of a jungle.

Frank pointed to some peculiar and huge footprints in the soft soil of the plain.

All were instantly interested in the statement he made.

CHAPTER IV.

HUNTING ELEPHANTS.

"We have had a lion hunt," he cried. "Now, for diversion, let us try an elephant chase."

"An elephant chase!" cried Hal Martin, excitedly. "You don't mean that, Mr. Reade?"

"Certainly I do."

"But where are the elephants?"

"Do you see those tracks?"

"Yes."

"They are elephant tracks. Simply follow them and you will find your game."

Just at that moment a distant, peculiar sound came from the jungle.

"Do you hear that?" cried Frank.

"What is it?"

"Elephants trumpeting."

Of course all in the party were eager to engage in the rare sport of an elephant hunt.

Particularly so were Hal and Jack.

"It will be a good chance to secure some ivory," they declared.

"Certainly," replied Frank. "And I will promise you some fine tusks."

"But will we be all safe at close quarters with such huge beasts?" asked Hal.

"No," replied Frank; "they would tear the wagon all to pieces. We must use the utmost of care."

A broad path into the jungle was found, and into this the wagon ran.

They had not far to go.

A small lake occupied part of the jungle, and here the elephants, six in number, were engaged in play.

Nothing pleases an elephant more than to shower himself with water taken up by his trunk. This pastime all the elephants were engaged in.

But the appearance of the Electric Wagon upon the scene created a commotion.

Instantly the huge leader of the coterie, a veritable Jumbo, began to trumpet fiercely.

The other elephants, following his leadership, started out of the water. Barney ran the machine within fifty yards of the spot.

Frank Reade, Jr., Pomp, and Hal and Jack were all on hand with elephant rifles.

These threw an explosive shell, the peculiar invention of Frank Reade, Jr.

"Pick your elephant!" shouted Frank. "Let them have it now!"

And fire was at once opened.

The huge leader seemed the center of fire, and was hit three times.

Each time the explosive shell tore gaping wounds, but yet not sufficient to bring the monster down.

An elephant is well known to be the hardest of all animals to reach in a vital part.

This is owing to the leathery toughness of its skin, and the depth of its flesh tissues.

The effect of the shots upon the leader was terrific. He paused and emitted maddened shrieks for several moments.

Then he turned and charged for the Electric Wagon.

"Look out, Barney!" cried Frank. "Do not let him get to close quarters!"

"All right, sor," replied the Celt.

And he swung the wagon off on a new course. The elephant made a blow at it with his trunk.

But the blow just grazed the netting, and the wagon, skillfully manipulated by Barney, was almost instantly upon the opposite side of the monster.

While at almost point-blank range, Hal and Pomp poured their fire into the monster's body.

It was left for Jack, however, to fire the shot which bagged the game.

The young New Yorker took careful aim and fired at the monster. The shell struck just behind the ear, and exploding with fearful force, tore its way into the brain.

With an almost human-like groan the monster reeled and toppling, fell with a tremendous crash.

But now a new danger menaced.

Wild cheers went up at the success of Jack's shot. But Frank suddenly cried:

"Look out! Wheel to the right, Barney!

There was good cause for this warning.

The other elephants, five in number, with almost human-like instinct, had turned in their course to avenge the death of their leader.

In a single column they charged straight for their white foes.

There was need of quick work upon Barney's part.

The Celt turned the wheel hard about and ran before the advancing column of giant foes.

Of course the wagon could go faster than the elephants, and so it kept ahead of them.

And now Frank Reade, Jr., made a lucky shot.

Selecting one of the largest of the line, he fired for a point under the shoulder.

The shell struck exactly in the right spot. A hole was torn into the heart, and the elephant tumbled in a heap.

Four more were left.

Within a hundred yards another was killed.

The remaining three made off into the jungle.

Chase was not given.

Three elephants in one day was enough, and now our hunters, returning to secure their game so royally bagged.

The largest of the elephants had tusks of simply tremendous dimensions. They were secured, as were the others.

The smell of the blood had drawn a host of savage animals to the scene.

Hyenas and wolves were growling and squalling in the

undergrowth, waiting only the departure of the human foes to indulge in a royal feast.

"Hurrah!" cried Hal Martin, as the ivory tusks were lugged aboard. "I can hardly see how one can expect more royal sport than this. For my part, I am more than satisfied."

"So am I!" cried Jack. "There is one thing more I'd like."

"What?"

"A rhinoceros hunt."

"Perhaps we may be able to have one," said Frank. "Time will tell."

Thus far nothing had been seen of the hostile blacks supposed to inhabit the region.

Not a village or settlement had been encountered.

All the civilized settlements, as Frank knew, were far to the south. But the voyagers were not long to remain in doubt as to the character of the natives of this section.

All that day the wagon crossed broad pampas. The next day they came to the shores of a mighty lake, across which the opposite shore could not be seen.

"The Mutsu Ki Lake," said Frank, consulting his chart. "We are truly getting nearer Central Africa."

"Hurrah!" cried Hal Martin. "How soon shall we strike for the south?"

"As soon as we get beyond the valley of the Congo," replied Frank, "and that we ought to reach by another day."

This announcement had hardly been made when the attention of all was claimed by a singular incident.

From a clump of bushes near suddenly a giant black appeared.

He was armed with a shield, battle club and assegai, and was a formidable-looking fellow.

He regarded the Electric Wagon with apparent amazement. For a moment he seemed unable to move.

Then with a terrified yell he made a backward leap and vanished in the jungle.

The travelers had all seen him and were deeply impressed.

"Bejabers, I'd not loike to meet him afther dark!" cried Barney. "Bad cess to the omadhoun!"

"Golly!" gasped Pomp. "I done fink he am a wild man."

"Wait awhile and you will see others," said Frank. "If I mistake not, we are very near a settlement of them."

The young inventor pointed to a dull line of haze in the atmosphere just beyond the jungle.

"Smoke!" cried Hal Martin.

"That is what it is."

"What will you do, Mr. Reade?" asked the young New Yorker. "Had we not better avoid a close acquaintance with them?"

"That would no doubt be the most cautious move to make and perhaps the wisest," replied Frank, "but I have some little curiosity to make their acquaintance."

"So have I!" cried Jack Fuller, eagerly. "I don't see how they can do us much harm."

"We shall not have long to wait."

Frank was right in this.

Soon a distant medley of sounds came from beyond the jungle. Prominent among them was the muffled beating of tom-toms.

"The whole tribe is aroused," declared Frank. "They will be here soon."

Frank changed the position of the wagon to open ground near the lake. Here the coming of the black was awaited.

Suddenly the distant tumult ceased.

All became as quiet as the grave.

What did it mean?

Not a sign of a black could be seen anywhere. Were they adopting Indian tactics?

The travelers kept a keen watch of the jungle.

Suddenly Jack Fuller cried:

"Look! What do you call that?"

There was a good reason for this exclamation. All saw it at the same moment.

Just above the jungle grass the tufted heads of several assegais were seen.

Then from the jungle, with a whirr like a covey of quail, came a shower of arrows.

They rained against the wire netting of the wagon harmlessly.

Another and another flight came.

"Bejabers, let's give 'em a bit av a volley!" cried Barney.

But Frank forbade this.

"Wait a bit," he said. "I want to parley with the rascals."

Seeing that their arrows had no effect upon the invaders of their country, the natives began to throw javelins.

These were heavier, and given with greater force.

But they were as easily turned aside by the steel netting.

For some while this species of attack was kept up.

Frank had hoped to gain a parley with the blacks without the necessity of taking human life.

But this speedily was proven an impossibility.

Seeing that this method of attack did not work, the blacks now, with loud war cries, burst from the jungle.

They made a tremendous charge for the Electric Wagon.

What would have been the result had they reached it is hard to say.

Frank Reade, Jr., saw the necessity of prompt action and cried:

"Give them a volley, friends! Beat them back!"

Crack-ack-ack!

Rifles cracked in chorus, and natives were shot down in numbers, but there was a tremendous body of them.

The volley did not seem to deter them in the least.

On they came like a mighty wave of the sea, threatening to overrun the wagon and its occupants.

Frank Reade, Jr., saw the desperateness of the exigency.

Only one thing could stop the foe. It was *dernier ressort*, but he did not hesitate to employ it.

He sprang down into the gun-room, where were the two electric guns.

CHAPTER V.

AMONG THE MOKOMBOS.

In all cases Frank Reade, Jr., was a humane man, and much averse to the taking of human life.

But in this case self-preservation was a necessity.

He had no other recourse.

It was but a moment's work to train each of the guns upon the advancing line of blacks.

Then Frank pressed the electric lever. There was a whirring sound, a recoil, as the pneumatic tubes worked, and the projectiles were expelled.

The aim was accurate, and the projectiles struck the mark. Straight through the advancing line they plowed with fearful effect.

Nearly a score of the foe were hurled into the air and torn into fragments. The fearful havoc was demoralizing to the foe.

They halted, wavered, and then retreated in wild confusion into the jungle.

Those on board the Electric Wagon cheered lustily and opened fire again with their rifles.

But the blacks had been thoroughly repulsed and did not at once venture another attack.

They retreated into the jungle out of range. For a time they were silent.

"Victory is ours!" cried Hal Martin, joyfully. "I don't believe there is anything living can stand up before those electric guns of yours, Mr. Reade."

"Indeed, I am of that opinion myself," replied Frank. "Dynamite is a deadly article."

"I should say so!"

"Shall we go on now?" asked Jack.

"Not yet," replied Frank. "We must do a little parleying with these fellows. I want to find out the shortest route to get around this lake and reach the Congo."

"What! do you think they will dare attack us again?"

"No; but they will now make friendly overtures. You will see."

Frank was right.

Scarcely half an hour had elapsed when a black stepped out of the jungle with both hands uplifted.

This was in token of amity, and just what Frank Reade, Jr., had been looking for.

The young inventor at once answered it by appearing on the balcony and making a friendly gesture.

This encouraged the black to advance.

When within speaking distance he addressed Frank in some unintelligible lingo.

The young inventor shook his head.

"I don't understand."

This was what the fellow caught from Frank's gesture. He smiled, and then, to Frank's intense surprise, addressed him in Portuguese.

This the young inventor had a smattering of, and conversation now became easy.

The Portuguese language had probably been learned by the black from the traders of that nationality who traveled among the tribes buying slaves and ivory.

"I am envoy of Mokombo the king!" the black said, impressively; "he sends greeting to the white king of the fire wagon."

"I return the greeting," replied Frank. "We should be friends."

"Yes," replied the black envoy, eagerly.

"How many are your people?"

The black made a sign as if to count the stars in the sky. The young inventor smiled at this falsification.

"Where is your village?"

The black pointed over the jungle.

Then he said:

"We have many slaves. Come to the village and we will sell cheap."

"I am not a buyer of slaves," replied Frank.

The black looked astonished.

"No?" he replied, incredulously. Then he drew a portion of an ivory tusk from beneath his waist cloth.

"You buy this?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Frank.

The fellow nodded his head eagerly in reply, and after a time beckoned to the voyagers.

"Come to the village and see King Mokombo," he said.

"He sell many slaves; much ivory."

Frank at once started for the pilot-house. But Hal Martin intervened.

"Mercy on us!" he exclaimed. "Shall we dare to invade their village?"

"Oh, yes," replied Frank.

"But shall we not fear treachery?"

"I think not," replied the young inventor. "At least we will be on our guard."

Of course no one could oppose Frank in his purpose. He was the leader, and the others could but agree.

The Mokombo warrior led the way almost down to the lake shore.

Here a broad path led through the jungle. In a broad clearing, leading down to the water's edge, was the native village.

There were visible several hundred negro huts, and as the machine appeared, a great number of the natives rushed out of these.

But in the center of the collection of huts a huge thatched pavilion was seen.

The roof was immensely broad, and beneath it was a bamboo throne hung with lion skins.

Upon the throne sat a venerable-looking negro, with more than the usual number of ivory and brass rings upon his arms, and wearing a headdress of egret feathers.

About the pavilion was a solid mass of black warriors, forming a sort of protecting square.

Otherwise the Mokombo village was not different from the ordinary negro settlement in African wilds.

As the Electric Wagon rolled into the village, its imposing appearance made apparently a powerful impression upon the unsophisticated blacks.

Some of them stood gaping at it in sheer amazement. Others fell upon their faces with superstitious terror.

But the guard about the pavilion lowered their javelins threateningly, and stood ready to defend their king's life with their own.

But Frank Reade, Jr., at a respectable distance, brought the machine to a halt.

Then he elevated one of the electric guns and threw a bomb out into the lake.

This was for effect.

The projectile struck the water half a mile from shore. There was a roar, and then the rush of waters in cataract.

Full fifty feet into the air the water was lifted by the force of the dynamite. It was a wonderful display.

The black king even seemed for a moment to partake of the awe and fear of his subjects.

At once four nearly naked savages stepped down from the dais, and bearing an ivory tusk between them, approached the wagon.

Their attitude was supplicating, and accepting the token of amity, Frank stepped out upon the balcony of the wagon.

He was thus exposed to the javelins of the foe, and they could easily have killed him at the moment.

It was a great risk, but the young inventor knew that it was the only way to make treaty with the barbarians.

So he stood before the savage throng coolly and fearlessly.

In his hand he held a dagger with a fancifully chased handle of brass. As the emissaries of the black king laid the ivory tusk at his feet he tendered them the dagger.

The four blacks accepted it, and conveyed it to the king. Then a startling thing happened.

Suddenly the black monarch rose upon his throne and uttered a strange, harsh call.

Instantly every Bowman in the crowd of several thousand guards drew the bow string and sent a cloud of arrows flying into the air.

Then a shower of javelins followed, all of which flew into the jungle.

Next the entire body of savage warriors began a war dance about the pavilion.

Frank's companions were for a moment alarmed for his safety, and cried:

"Come in, Frank! Don't expose yourself so needlessly." But the young inventor knew better than this.

It would only betray a knowledge and fear of the strength of the black foe, and give them encouragement.

This would never do. Frank understood exactly what all this display was for. It was to make an impression on the white invaders.

The politic move, therefore, was to if possible offset this.

So the young inventor affected to view the exhibition with unconcern.

Then he turned and said:

"Barney!"

"Yis, sor," replied the Celt.

"Train one of the electric guns upon that huge banyan. Don't miss it."

"All roight, sor." The Celt sprang into the gunroom. In a moment he had the gun bearing upon the huge banyan. Then he pressed the lever.

Whirr—plug—boom!

The explosion shook the earth. When the dust was cleared away nothing was seen of the tree.

The astounded blacks stood for a moment in consternation. Then the populace fell upon their faces.

The king's guard shrank closer to the throne. The monarch himself hastily spoke to some attendants.

Then down from the dais they came again bearing another ivory tusk. This was tendered Frank, and one of the blacks said in Portuguese:

"King Mokombo welcomes the white men and their fire wagon."

A lane was made between the lines of black warriors up to the throne. By gestures they showed that the black king desired an audience with his visitors.

Frank at once boldly left the wagon.

But his companions kept their rifles ready for an emergency.

However, there was no need of this precaution.

The blacks were completely awed and ready for peaceful overtures.

Frank walked boldly up to the black king's throne.

To his surprise Mokombo stepped down and with a pleasant smile tendered his hand, saying fluently in Portuguese:

"The white man is welcome. Mokombo will not seek battle with him, but rather to be his friend."

Frank bowed and replied:

"The black king speaks well. I feel that we shall be friends."

"The white man has come for slaves. I have a thousand at his command."

"No!" replied Frank, emphatically. "You misjudge me, king, I am an enemy of the slave hunter."

The king looked astonished.

"You are Portuguese?" he asked.

"No. I am an American."

"What is that?"

"The most progressive, enlightened, and powerful nation on the earth," replied Frank. "It is far over the sea."

"Ah!" replied the king, slowly. "You are the same as the Inglie who seeks to explore but not to slave hunt."

"Yes," replied Frank.

Instantly the king's manner changed toward Frank. He fell upon his neck in a rapturous fashion, crying:

"You are our great and good friend of whom the prophets have told us. You have come to save Mokombo from the slave hunters. Praise be to thee!"

Then at a gesture from the king, every negro musician began a weird but not unmusical selection upon their reed instruments.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SLAVE TRADERS.

Frank saw at once that the ignorant mind of the black king had at once accepted him as a savior, and that homage was due him.

While Frank did not exactly like the idea of perpetuating deception, yet he saw that for the time being it could better serve his ends to let the impression remain.

So he acknowledged the king's deference with a smile and a bow.

After the musicians had finished, the king made another gesture, and instantly slaves appeared, bringing a bountiful feast of roasted pheasant and broiled rabbit, rich fruits from the bread and banana trees.

This was instantly spread upon the dais. The guards fell back, and the king seated himself upon the ground, taking up the two reeds used as knife and fork by the negroes.

Frank saw that he was expected to at least make a pretense of indulging in the bountiful fare.

So he seated himself opposite the black king and proceeded to dissect one of the pheasants.

And as they ate they talked upon various subjects.

Frank speedily discovered that King Mokombo was really a jolly old fellow.

From him Frank learned that within a week a party of Portuguese had visited the village.

They had taken away with them over one hundred slaves and much ivory.

The king explained that they were oftentimes obliged to sell all the very best young men of the tribe, for the failure to comply with the threats of the Portuguese meant a bloody war.

Frank was very indignant when he heard this, and cried: "That is an outrage! The whole set of them should be exterminated! When do you expect another set?"

The king began to count his fingers.

Then he gave a great start.

"To-day," he replied.

Frank was startled.

"So soon?" he exclaimed. "But I am glad of that. I will promise you that they shall take no slaves from this village."

The king uttered a cry of joy.

"You are great and kind," he cried. "The god of the moon will bless you!"

Hardly had the words escaped the lips of the king when a startling sound came from the distance.

It was the blare of a bugle, and in an instant the entire village was thrown into a state of the wildest excitement.

The negro guard gathered closer about the throne.

Mokombo, once more a warrior, sprang up, with flashing eyes and defiant mien.

"The Portuguese!" he cried; "they come!"

Frank was instantly upon his feet.

He saw at once a spectacle which thrilled him.

Across the low green plain by the lake a long caravan was marching.

There were fully two hundred human beings in that procession, as well as a large number of buffalo oxen, the African beasts of burden, and one elephant.

Fifty of the party were white men of the most villainous type, and armed to the teeth.

The remainder were blacks; a long, dismal line of emaciated, toiling wretches, half dead from starvation, and ironed in pairs by means of steel manacles.

It was a wretched-looking sight, such as would make the tender heart of a philanthropist quiver. But Frank Reade, Jr., felt more than pity for the poor slaves. He was boiling over with indignation against the slave traders.

"They come!" cried Mokombo, with scowling brow. "Now we must give up some of our young men!"

"Never!" cried Frank. "Send your warriors out there and liberate your fellow beings!"

But the king shook his head sadly.

"They will kill us all," he replied. "We can only obey them."

"Then order your warriors to fall back," said the young inventor. "Let me talk with them."

King Mokombo complied with this.

The young inventor then walked rapidly forward to meet the caravan.

At the head of it, upon a buffalo ox, rode a tall, swarthy complexioned Portuguese.

He showed his white teeth and waved his hand in salute at sight of Frank.

Then he descended from the ox and advanced, saying:

"Buenos, senor! You are here before me. You have picked the best of this set of black dogs."

"You mistake," said Frank, coldly. "I am not a slave buyer."

"So, senor!" exclaimed the slave trader, in surprise.

"You are Inglis?"

"I am American!"

"Wonderful country! Your people used once to trade in slaves!"

"But, thanks to Providence! they do not now!" replied Frank.

"Ah! Senor Americano is after ivory, then?"

"Well, yes," replied Frank.

"I am Manuel Gaston, of St. Paul de Loanda. And you——"

"I am Frank Reade, of Readestown, U. S. A.," replied Frank.

"So? And you seek only ivory?"

"I seek more than that," replied Frank, sternly. "And that is, so far as I am able, the liberation of my fellow men. I demand that you liberate every one of those poor wretches whom you have manacled there!"

The slave trader was astounded.

For a moment he could not speak or act, so taken aback was he.

"Per Dios!" he exclaimed. "You are joking, senor?"

"I am in dead earnest."

"You demand that I liberate those slaves, which are mine?"

"I do."

"Per Dios, man, they are my property!"

"Never! They owe allegiance only to their Maker. If you do not at once strike off their chains, I will do it!"

The face of the Portuguese flamed with anger.

"You?" he gritted.

"Yes, I!"

"But, caramba! Who are you that dare threaten me in this way? You are a fly—a toad! Beware, or it will be the worse for you!"

Frank was too angry to weigh his words. He replied:

"You will find out that I have the power to blow you and your villainous clan into eternity!"

"Per Dios! That is braggadocio! Ho, there, Alvorado, Herman, seize this obstreperous fellow and put him in irons! Ha, ha, ha! He shall march with the slaves! We will take the impudence out of him!"

But before the minions of the slave trader could obey his order, Frank pulled a brace of revolvers and covered Gaston.

"Countermand that order!" he commanded, sternly. "If you do not you are a dead man!"

The Portuguese was taken wholly by surprise.

He made an effort to draw his own pistol, but the hammer of Frank's weapon clicked ominously.

"Hands off!" threatened the young inventor. "Time is up!"

"Per Christo!" gasped the Portuguese captain. "You are the devil! Put down your weapons. We will be friends."

"Send back your men."

The slave trader gave the order. The two Portuguese fell back.

Then Frank began to walk toward the village.

He blew a shrill note with a whistle.

It was a signal to Barney and Pomp. They understood well, and were not slow to answer.

From among the huts the Electric Wagon rolled in view.

Manuel Gaston and his villainous crew regarded it with amazement. The next moment Frank was aboard.

In a few words he explained the situation to his fellow travelers.

"Good for you, Frank!" cried Hal Martin. "I glow in your spunk. It would be a mercy to wipe the whole gang out of existence."

But while the slave traders seemed to regard the Electric Wagon with surprise, they did not show fear.

Indeed, Gaston had given some sharp orders to his men, and they were quickly forming into line, with the slaves behind them.

It was evident that they expected an attack, and were bound to be well prepared for it.

Frank brought the Electric Wagon up to within fifty yards of the caravan.

Then he hailed them.

"Hello!" he shouted.

Gaston stepped out.

"What do you want?" he cried.

"I demand the release of every slave in your possession!" replied Frank.

A volley of curses came back.

"Maybe you think I am a fool, Senor Americano. I don't know what sort of a chariot you have there, but I warn you that we'll pull it to pieces, and hang every dog of you, if you attempt to interfere with us!"

Frank smiled grimly.

Then he made reply:

"Senor Gaston, I give you five minutes in which to comply with my demand. If it is not executed by that time I shall proceed to open fire upon you!"

"Do you mean that, senor?"

"Every word of it!"

"You are reckless!"

"We shall see!"

"Very well, since you declare war, let it be so. We may as well begin."

Sharp, ringing orders Gaston gave his men.

They instantly drew a line upon the Electric Wagon, and when Gaston's voice was heard:

"Fire!"

The bullets came rattling like hail against the steel netting. The wagon trembled with the combined impact.

"That looks like a fight," cried Hal. "What do you say, Frank?"

"You are right, my boy," replied the young inventor. "Just the same, those slaves must be liberated!"

"Golly, Marse Frank!" cried Pomp. "Jes' let dis chile draw a line on dem rapsCALLIONS!"

"Bejabbers, that's the talk!"

Both Barney and Pomp were all eagerness to try their lim.

But Frank said:

"No, no; not yet! I don't want to kill any of them unless I am obliged to."

"I am afraid you will find that a necessity," declared Jack, with conviction.

"We shall see," said Frank, coolly.

The young inventor went below and trained one of the dynamite guns.

It could be seen now that the Portuguese were preparing for offensive tactics.

They were massing for a charge, and Frank saw that they must be checked at once.

So he trained the guns upon a huge boulder just to the right of their line.

He pressed the lever.

The projectile struck the boulder full force. There was a terrific roar and the huge rock was split into a thousand fragments.

It was like the blowing up of a mine, and many of the Portuguese were hurled to the ground.

A panic seized them, and all, Gaston with them, fled to the cover of the jungle near.

It was Frank's chance now.

CHAPTER VII.

THE HIPPOPOTAMUS HUNT.

The poor slaves were crouching in abject terror.

Being chained, they were unable to make a retreat. Frank saw the opportunity, and drove the wagon forward.

It was now between the slaves and the Portuguese.

With the electric guns pointed to the jungle, Frank threw open the doors of the cage.

"Come, Barney and Pomp!" he cried, "bring cold chisels

and hammers, and cut the manacles off these poor wretches!"

This order was quickly obeyed.

The wretched blacks, too astonished to move, submitted to the operation without a murmur.

In a short while all were free. The result was wonderful.

King Mokombo's people rushed about them. There was embracing and even tears. It was an affecting sight.

"Who can gaze upon that scene and countenance slavery?" cried Frank, in a ringing voice. "I tell you slavery is the curse of the universe!"

The voyagers all cheered, and an answering yell of anger came back from the jungle.

Then Hal Martin said:

"Treachery! Look out!"

From the jungle there came a fearful volley of rifle balls. Fifty odd bullets swept through the crowd.

Several of the blacks fell dead or mortally wounded.

At once a fearful uproar arose.

King Mokombo sounded the war cry.

A thousand blacks rushed to arms.

Frank now had his anger up.

"Annihilate the whole villainous gang!" he shouted. "They deserve it."

At the same moment he rushed to the electric gun and sent a dynamite ball into the jungle.

The effect was terrific.

The tall canes of the jungle were mowed down in an area of half an acre.

Many of the Portuguese were blown into eternity.

The remainder of the murderous gang, followed by the avenging blacks, fled.

King Mokombo, overwhelmed with joy, came rushing up to the wagon. He fairly embraced Frank.

"You are the black man's friend!" he cried in Portuguese. "The god of the moon will bless you!"

Gaston and his band did not return to the attack.

Later in the day the pursuing party of blacks returned, reporting that scarcely a dozen of the slave traders survived.

These had reached a place of safety in the hills.

Truly vengeance most dire had overtaken them.

"Were it not for other interests which claim my time," said Frank, "I would like to devote years of my life to the stamping out of this curse of Africa, one of the fairest portions of the earth."

"Truly, a nobler or more philanthropic mission could not be conceived," agreed Hal Martin.

But the Mokombos were the happiest of all.

They were inclined to worship their white champion as the greatest of benefactors.

That night a grand fete was held in the village. Torches were posted everywhere, a carpet of matting was laid through the streets, cocoanut wine was freely given by order of the king, dances and a general carnival was in order.

This was much enjoyed by the white travelers.

Much valuable information in regard to the habits of the African natives was thus gained.

That night Mokombo came to Frank and said:

"To-morrow we will hunt the hippopotamus. We will have sport!"

This idea caught on with Hal and Jack hugely.

"Whew!" cried Jack. "Just think how envious our friends at home will be when we tell them of our hippopotamus hunt."

So the coming of the morrow was eagerly awaited.

It was a late hour when they retired, and all slept soundly until dawn.

Then the tom-tom awakened all, and soon every one was astir. Preparations for the hunt were carried rapidly on.

The American gentleman invites his guest to dinner or to the theater, but the African prototype considers a hunt the ne plus ultra of fashionable amusement.

A hundred of the best warriors of the tribe were selected by Mokombo.

These were brave and fearless in the water and out. They were delegated to go ahead and clear the way.

Their mission was not a little perilous.

They must needs boldly invade the deadly saw grass, where lurked the crocodile and several species of poisonous serpents.

At any moment they were apt to stumble upon a lion or a tiger, and death from poisonous spiders and insects was also to be feared.

However, the advance guard was soon under way.

They started fully an hour ahead of the hunters, who were really King Mokombo and several of his officers and the voyagers of the Electric Wagon.

The hippopotamus found a home in all cases in remote and almost inaccessible spots.

The deepest, darkest part of the swamp, where the undergrowth was such a tangle that it was almost impossible for human beings to penetrate, was the likeliest spot.

The soft and dirty quicksand is the delight of the beast.

It is always considered safer to hunt the animal from the land. An attempt to capture him from a boat would be almost certain to result disastrously.

A gang of natives carried long lances and powerful coils of plaited rope made from antelope hide. This was to help the monster out of the water with after he had been bagged.

The party set out on foot and in high spirits.

The walk was full six miles, and involved some arduous climbing, which did much to increase the difficulty and hence the pleasure of the undertaking.

But after a time the party came to the scene of action.

The advance guard had cut a path through the dense undergrowth, and after climbing through the bog for a quarter of a mile or more, the scene of action was reached.

Despite their early start, the advance guard reached the spot but little in advance of the hunting party.

Just here an arm of the lake made a deep and muddy lagoon, thickly fringed with saw grass.

Here was the paradise of the "hippo." Almost as soon as the party reached the spot the snout of one was seen rise out of a muddy pool not fifty yards away.

Hal could not resist the impulse, and raising his rifle fired.

The bullet evidently struck the monster, for it uttered a hoarse snort and vanished in the depths.

"Confound it!" cried Hal. "He has gone to the bottom! How can we get him up?"

"You'll have to wait till he comes up," declared Frank.

"Why, I hit him."

"That may be, but it takes more than one bullet to kill one of those fellows. They have a hide as tough as leather. Moreover, if your shot had been fatal he would have risen to the surface, anyway."

"Well," muttered Hal, "I'll take better aim next time."

"Aim for the eye," said Frank. "It's like shooting alligators."

But King Mokombo now proceeded to show the white men how to hunt the hippopotamus.

Four of the strongest and best swimmers ventured out into the water, each carrying the corner of a huge net.

This net was made of the very toughest fibers of a certain species of a clinging vine found in the forest.

Heavy stones were attached to the lower part of the net, which was allowed to drag on the bottom.

Out into the water swam the blacks.

There was no little risk in this.

At any moment a "hippo" might rise and gobble one of them up. As a general thing, however, the huge leviathans seldom troubled a human being.

The net was carried to the opposite bank.

Then two large parties laid hold of the ropes and proceeded to drag it down the stream.

The result was quickly apparent. Of course the hippopotamus was assailed in the very depth of his lair. Within a distance of not more than ten yards one was struck.

The net, striking the monster under the water, at once gave it a start, and naturally the beast rose to the surface to ascertain the cause of his disturbance.

This was the opportunity of the hunters. The net instantly closed about the brute, and when he reached the surface he was already entangled.

Then the move was to drag the monster ashore, if possible, before he could sink again.

In the meshes of the net the "hippo" could be dispatched with assegais before he could break away.

The "hippo" started this time was a monster of its kind. As it was brought to the surface there was a tremendous whirlpool in the water, and the blacks, a score in number, began to pull on the ropes.

This drew the "hippo" rapidly to the shore. Of course the brute was mad, and thrashed the water and mud unmercifully.

"Now, white men," cried King Mokombo, "fire at him!" They needed no second bidding.

Hal and Jack opened fire with their rifles. Bullets rapidly tore their way into the flesh of the "hippo."

In this manner the brute was very quickly dispatched. Two more were captured in the same way, and then the white hunters avowed they had had enough.

The blacks cut the flesh of the beasts up into strips, it being esteemed a great delicacy.

They were experts in the cutting up of the beasts.

The hides were preserved for the making of impenetrable shields.

Then, as the day was drawing to a close, it was decided to return home.

The party easily found its way out of the swamp, and the march home was begun.

All were in high spirits.

The hunt had been a success.

"If we are to have such sport right along," declared Hal, enthusiastically, "I believe I'll remain in Africa indefinitely."

"I'm with you, pard," cried Jack.

But Frank laughed and said:

"I fear that in a few years homesickness would take you back to America."

"Oh, I'll acknowledge that America is the greatest of all countries," averred Hal; "but just the same I believe that bright days are near at hand for Darkest Africa."

CHAPTER VIII.

AT THE HILL OF IVORY.

"That is a certain fact," agreed Frank Reade, Jr. "It is true that no other continent furnishes the magnificent resources of this."

At this juncture they had reached the banks of a small creek.

This they were to follow to a ford just a mile below. Thence it was across a peninsula to the Mokombo village.

Just across the creek was a grove of banyan trees.

Suddenly there was a loud crash. The report of rifles was heard upon the opposite bank.

Frank Reade, Jr., threw up his arms and fell to the ground with a groan.

Barney had a bullet pass through his sleeve. Pomp's cheek was grazed. Others of the party had narrow escapes.

A loud cry of agony went up from the party, and all rushed about the fallen young inventor.

"Ochone! It's dead he is!" cried Barney, in anguish. "Shure, that was a devil's thrick!"

"Fo' de Lor' sake, don' yo' say dat Marse Frank am done killed!" wailed Pomp.

"Stand back! Give him air!" cried Hal, authoritatively, as he bent down over the fallen man.

But the fears of all were at once dispelled.

Blood was streaming down Frank's face, but he sprang quickly to his feet, saying:

"Don't fear, friends. I am not hurt. Look out for yourselves!"

The bullet had just grazed Frank's skull, making a slight scalp wound. It was a narrow escape.

The party cheered in the excess of their joy.

Then the question arose as to who had fired the dastardly volley. A glance across the stream was sufficient.

A dozen forms were seen running wildly across an open strip beyond the banyan grove.

It was the Portuguese, and they were endeavoring to make an escape in that direction.

No attempt was made to pursue them, as this was not deemed wise or not worth while.

"Let them go," said Frank, as he bandaged his head. "We may meet Manuel Gaston again."

The party reached the Mokombo village about dark.

Everything was found safe and sound. But it was too late to pursue the journey further that night.

Frank informed Mokombo of his intention to pursue his journey in the morning.

The Mokombo king was deeply grieved and wildly implored the travelers to make their home with him.

But all expressed their appreciation of his kindness and declined.

"If Gaston or his gang bother you again show them no mercy," said Frank, forcibly, to the Mokombo king.

The next day leave was taken of the Mokombos.

"Now for the hill of ivory!" cried Frank. "That is our mission, and we should fulfill it."

Hal and Jack, of course, acquiesced warmly in this.

The Electric Wagon now entered upon a low, rolling country until the banks of the Congo were reached.

Here they were for a time held in abeyance. But finally a raft was made, and upon this the wagon was ferried across the great river.

"We are now in the Congo Free State," cried Frank, as the machine was once more booming along. "Now for the kingdom of Kossongo."

"And the Ivory Hill!" cried Hal.

For weeks the Electric Wagon kept on its swift run over a widely diversified region.

Plains as level as a floor were crossed, rivers and creeks forded, swamps and lakes circumvented, and many thrilling experiences had.

But one day the wagon entered a long, deep valley between rocky hills.

"The kingdom of Kossongo!" cried Frank. "Bring up your chart, Hal!"

The young New Yorker was not slow in complying.

Frank studied it carefully, and said:

"We are fifty miles north of it. Before nightfall, barring obstacles, we will be there!"

The spirits of all were on the qui vive now. The Electric Wagon bowled on over level ground for most of the distance.

Then a particularly wild and wooded tract of country was reached.

A small stream was followed for some ways, because the banks were clear and allowed a roadway for the wagon.

Suddenly Frank cried:

"There is your ivory!"

Instantly all gazed in the direction indicated. A white glaring substance was seen through the trees.

It was a literal hill of white substance fully a hundred feet high. A moment later the Electric Wagon burst through the trees, and the hill of ivory was not fifty yards distant.

And truly it was a wonderful and impressive sight.

Elephant tusks of the very largest size were piled up

there in immense quantity. The travelers gazed up at the spectacle spellbound.

"That beats me!" exclaimed Hal, drawing a deep breath. "how on earth did all that ivory ever get there?"

"I think I can explain that," said Frank Reade, Jr.

"How?"

"The tribe of blacks near here are probably idolaters and have perhaps for fifty years or more been in the habit of piling up these tusks as an offering to their gods."

In lieu of a better explanation this was accepted.

"However it may be," cried Hal, "here is the grand fortune we are seeking, Jack, and now to reap it!"

The entire party left the Electric Wagon and advanced to the heap of ivory.

"Indeed, boys," said Frank, "you have a mighty fortune here. But your uncle mentions a hostile tribe near who will not allow you to take the ivory away."

"What of that?" said Hal, impatiently. "All we need is a hundred determined men."

"Ah! but the trouble is to get them."

"Then we must try and make terms with the natives."

"It is possible you can do that."

But the words had barely left Frank's lips when a thrilling thing occurred.

Suddenly a fearful uproar arose.

From a clump of palms just beyond the pile of ivory a legion of black forms swarmed.

"Quick! For your lives!" shouted Frank. "Back to the wagon!"

The travelers needed no urging. The peril was too plain to be disregarded.

Back to the wagon they went with all haste.

A mighty shower of arrows and javelins came after them, but fortunately nobody was hurt.

Aboard the Electric Wagon they scrambled, and Hal Martin cried:

"Thank goodness! we got out of that scrape in good shape. I was in great fear for the moment that they would overtake us!"

"Mercy!" cried Jack Fuller; "what savage fellows they are! And look! They mean to attack the wagon!"

This was quite plain. The blacks had not ceased their onward course, and the vicinity fairly swarmed with them.

Frank realized full well what it meant to have them reach the wagon. Such a vast number would certainly involve disastrous results.

He could even then have trained the electric guns upon them and made havoc in their ranks.

But again he was averse to such wholesale taking of life.

So he sprang to the wheel-house and quickly swung the head of the wagon about.

"Begorra, phwat will yez do, Misther Frank?" cried Barney. "Shure, will yez be afther givin them our heels?"

"This once, Barney," replied Frank.

"Shure, sor, phwat's that for?"

"Don't ask questions. You will learn in time."

The Electric Wagon soon reached the plain. Then the blacks were distanced. Frank now brought the machine to a halt.

Darkness was at hand, and the young inventor selected a retired spot just by a running stream of water.

"We will return in the morning," he said; "perhaps we can treat with them then. If they continue hostile we will find a way to bring them to terms."

So the night passed quietly in this spot. The next day the wagon was once more on its way.

Frank's purpose now was to find the Kossongo village, so he approached the hill of ivory from a different quarter.

And as he did so there came into view a most peculiar formation of the earth's surface.

Straight up from the plain rose the sheer walls of a mighty plateau, extending miles to the southward.

As far as could be seen this unbroken wall of sheer ascent continued. To the height of two hundred feet and more it arose.

There seemed not a break in it, or any way of reaching the level above. What manner of country it was up above there could not very well be guessed.

Waving palms and heavy, luxuriant vines hung over the edge of the plateau. This was all that could be seen.

"Well!" exclaimed Hal Martin in amazement, "is not that peculiar? A country in the air!"

"Is it peopled with human beings?" remarked Jack.

"That is hard to say," declared Frank Reade, Jr. "But we will try and learn more about it very soon."

The wagon now skirted the wall of the plateau to the southward, finding a good, smooth plain to run over.

They were now upon the opposite side of the palm growth in which was the hill of ivory.

And as they drew nearer to it, suddenly Barney gave a loud cry.

"Shure, Misther Frank, wud yez luk at that?" he cried.

Frank, and the others as well, saw at that moment the cause of Barney's exclamation.

A black form, not fifty yards distant, had run skulking into a clump of tall grass. Instantly Frank brought the head of the machine about.

"Stop him!" he cried. "Don't fire, Barney; we must capture him alive."

Straight down for the clump of grass the wagon ran.

The black, seeing that he was discovered, threw his javelin at the wagon and then started to run.

But before he had gone far he fell, and then in abject terror buried his face like an ostrich in the sand.

Frank brought the wagon to a halt not ten feet from the terrified savage.

Barney and Pomp sprang out and hauled the fellow aboard.

For a time he was so stricken with fright that he could do nothing but lie still and shiver.

But a slight dose of whiskey soon made him at ease and very voluble. He could speak Portuguese fluently.

Frank at once began at once to catechise him, and the result was a literal revelation which was of great interest to the travelers.

The Kossongo native stated one very important fact.

This was that his people lived on the elevated plateau, and that access could only be had to the elevated kingdom by means of a tortuous cavern which was at times occupied by a swollen stream of water from the plateau above.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CLIFF PRISONER.

That the savage Kossongos occupied the plateau and which was almost inaccessible was a revelation.

The captive savage explained that the spot occupied by the ivory tusks was the tomb of a former king who was to come back to the earth after a certain number of tusks had been laid upon the pile.

The ceremony of laying tusks upon the pile was therefore performed at stated intervals, and it required the exertions of many hunters to find the requisite number.

The black also affirmed that his people were very bitter against the whites, and that it would be useless to attempt to treat with them.

All these very important things Frank learned from the black.

Then he asked:

"What is the name of your king?"

"Corocomo, the lion killer!" replied the black.

"Look here, you lying rascal, will you do my bidding if I spare your life?"

The black answered haughtily:

"A Kossongo does not fear death. I am your captive and slave!"

"Then you will do my bidding?"

The black inclined his head.

"Well and good!" declared Frank. "I want you to take a message to your king and bring me an answer. Tell him that we will pay him for the ivory, and that if he will come down and talk with us we will give him presents."

The Kossongo's face did not change.

"If he does not answer my call," continued Frank, "I will find a way to reach him on his elevated home, and I have the power to destroy him and all his tribe."

The black took the message and departed. He was soon out of sight.

"Do you expect to see him again?" asked Hal, incredulously.

"Perhaps not," replied Frank. "But I could do nothing else with him. I did not want to kill him."

"It is my opinion," ventured Jack, "that we shall never be able to take this ivory away without a battle."

"Very well," said the young inventor. "Let it be so."

"How do you expect to ever reach the surface of the plateau to attack the foe?"

"That we can decide later," said Frank. "We will now await an answer from Corocomo, the king."

"It is my opinion," said Jack Fuller, "that the darky will never come back again."

"Maybe not," said Frank. "However, we will give him a chance."

The Electric Wagon ran near the blank wall of the plateau.

It was seen that the stone of which it was composed was a curious kind of sandstone. As Frank noticed this, he said:

"Pshaw! That stone is easily worked. Steps could be cut in it to the very verge of the cliff above."

"Shall we do that?" cried Hal, eagerly. "I am just dying to get a look at the country above."

"We will see later on," replied the young inventor.

Perhaps an hour elapsed since the departure of the liberated black. Frank fancied that the fellow would return, and was anxious to hear the black king's reply.

Had it not been for this, he would not have lost further time, but would at once have endeavored to gain the summit of the plateau.

But just as his patience was beginning to give out Frank saw a distant form running rapidly across the plain.

It was the black.

As he drew nearer the wagon Frank descended and advanced to meet him.

The Kossongo now was armed with javelin and shield.

His manner was haughty as he came up to Frank and said:

"I come from King Corocomo. I delivered your message to him."

"Well," said Frank, "what did he say?"

"His answer is that the white man shall die if he troubles the sacrifice of ivory. That it is sacred to the moon and must not be disturbed."

"Ah, and is that all?"

"The white man must leave this country at once, or Corocomo will send his warriors against him."

Frank snapped his fingers and said:

"Go back and tell your king that I will blow him into eternity if he attempts to interfere with me in any way. I will buy his ivory and pay him a good price. But he must not attack us."

The Kossongo warrior turned and trotted away into the bush. He was soon out of sight.

Then Frank sprang aboard the wagon.

"We have got to have trouble with these fellows if we trouble the ivory," he declared. "What shall we do?"

Hal and Jack looked at each other.

"We came here for the ivory," said Hal. "I cannot see that it is sensible in these blacks to refuse to sell it to us. Why are we not justified in taking it?"

"No doubt you are," replied Frank; "but now the question is, how can you do it?"

"We cannot, unless you help us," replied Hal.

"That I will certainly do," replied Frank. "I will take you to St. Paul de Loanda on the coast. There you can organize a band of hunters and a caravan."

Hal and Jack exchanged glances.

"You are more than kind to us," said Jack, warmly. "We accept your kind offer."

"We hope to pay you back for all your kindness someday," said Hal.

"I ask no pay," replied Frank. "I am glad to be able to help you."

Frank was now determined to decide one problem which he had been considering.

He ran the Electric Wagon to the verge of the cliff; then he leaped out and examined the sandstone.

"Why," he cried, "it is an easy matter to cut steps in this! A common knife could easily do it."

But just at that moment a sharp and warning cry escaped the lips of those aboard the wagon.

"Look out, Frank!"

A shower of loose sand and pebbles came tumbling down upon the young inventor's head.

He leaped back, half expecting to be crushed under a heavy boulder; but a voice came down reassuringly:

"Don't fear! I am a friend! For God's sake, do not leave me!"

Then all looked up and were astounded at the sight which rewarded their gaze.

There, leaning over the cliff, was a half-naked white man.

At that height he looked almost like a child, but his voice could be plainly heard.

"Hello!" shouted Frank, in astonishment. "Who are you and what are you doing up there?"

"I am a poor, unfortunate wretch," replied the white man. "For six years I have been a prisoner on this accursed plateau. I am allowed to roam at will here, but I cannot get down."

The astonishment of the travelers can well be imagined. Here was a most unlooked-for incident.

"How did you ever get up there?" asked Frank.

"I was captured by the Kossongos while trying to carry away some of that pile of ivory yonder. My companions were all killed."

At this moment Hal gave a great cry.

"Do you suppose that he can be my uncle?" he gasped.

"Ask him," said Jack.

Whereupon Hal shouted:

"What is your name?"

"James Martin."

Hal gave a leap in the air and almost screamed:

"Mercy on us! It is uncle, whom I believed dead years ago! How strange! Hello, Uncle Jim! Don't you know me?"

"Bless my soul! It is Hal!" exclaimed the white captive, joyfully.

"That's just who it is," cried Hal. "Thank Heaven, uncle, you are alive!"

"You believed me dead?"

"Yes."

"And you might as well have, for I have been practically so. But what brought you to Africa?"

"Your letter telling me of the ivory."

"Heaven be praised for all this joy!" cried Col. Martin.

"Ah, if I could only get down to you!"

"We will find a way to get you down," said Frank. "But I say!"

"What?"

"How large a surface is the area of that plateau?"

"Many thousand acres."

"And it is as inaccessible on all sides?"

"Yes."

"How far are you from the main village of the Kossongos?"

"About a mile."

"Ah! How powerful a tribe are they?"

"Full six thousand strong."

"As many as that?"

"Yes."

"Is there any possibility of treating with their king?"

"Not the slightest. He is one of the most blood-thirsty monsters you ever saw."

"Ah! then the harshest course is the best with him?"

"I should say so."

"All right. Now, my friend," called Frank. "I propose to cut steps in this sandstone and join you up there. But if you wish to come down, say the word, and I'll fire a line up to you."

"It would seem so good to get down once more upon terra firma that I will beg you to do the latter," replied Col. Martin.

"All right."

Frank knew that it would be an easy matter to throw a line up there with the pneumatic gun.

He selected a long javelin shaft which lay upon the wagon's dasher. This he attached to the end of a rope, and was about to place the javelin in the barrel of one of the guns when a thrilling thing occurred.

Suddenly a warning cry came from Col. Martin.

"My God! Look out! They are in the bush all about you!"

At the same moment a shower of javelins came falling about the wagon.

The voyagers had just time to scramble aboard when the Kossongos were all about the wagon.

They were legion, and how they had managed to get so close upon the wagon unseen was a mystery.

But there they were, and the voyagers had barely barred the doors to the cage when they came swarming over the rail.

Barney had sprung to the wheel-house and switched on the current.

The wagon started ahead, but instantly a hundred stout savages laid hold of the wheels and held it firm.

Then, yelling like black fiends, they swarmed over the netting, hammering it madly with their battle axes.

In this position they could not be reached by rifle balls.

This onslaught was so furious that it seemed as if they must surely tear the machine to pieces.

It was the most critical situation that our African voy-

agers had yet found themselves in, and called for prompt and most energetic action.

CHAPTER X.

ON THE PLATEAU.

It seemed as if the savage Kossongos must really break their way through the netting.

But it was offering a powerful resistance, and did not yield. Frank Reade, Jr., acted quickly and coolly.

"Begorra, let me at the spalpeens!" cried Barney, rushing to a loophole and trying to get a shot at the wretches.

"Golly, I done fink dey mus' mean business, an' if we don' look out dey will break in on us!" yelled Pomp.

"Steady all!" cried Hal. "What's the word, Frank?"

"All on the non-conductor!" cried the young inventor, as he rushed out of the dynamo-room with a wire.

His purpose was seen at once, and all at once complied.

Frank had rubber shoes and gloves on, so that the electric current could not harm him.

The wire he carried was heavily charged.

It was but a moment's work for him to hold it up to the netting, and the result was most effective.

The manner in which the blacks abandoned the netting was comical.

Some were hurled straight away from it; others turned back somersaults, and some fell dead.

But still on came others, only to receive the shock, and also to retreat in dismay.

It required some time for the black crew to realize the exigency correctly. When they did, they ceased the attack.

Every part of the machine where there was a particle of steel was heavily charged.

To touch it was like receiving the kicks of ten mules, and in many cases was instantly fatal.

The Kossongos were dazed by so startling a denouement.

The tide of battle had turned and was already in the favor of the white men.

Barney instantly sprang to the wheel-house. Frank shut off the current, and then sprang to the electric guns.

He placed a projectile in the breech, and then switched on the current.

The bolt struck full in the midst of the black horde.

It was with frightful effect.

Full half a hundred were instantly killed and dozens were mortally wounded. Another bolt and the Kossongos fell back in terror.

Cheers burst from the lips of the victorious whites. The wagon was brought about.

It was useless to attempt to rescue the white prisoner of the plateau at present.

An idea occurred to Frank, which he proceeded to carry out.

"I have it!" he cried. "We must cut off the return of the warriors to their village on the plateau."

The others saw this plan at once and embraced it.

The wagon was sent forward at a rapid rate along the base of the plateau.

Frank's purpose was to find the mouth of the cavern by which the blacks made their ascent.

In this he was successful.

Two miles around the end of the elevation this was found. A small band of Kossongos were guarding it.

A dynamite bolt from the wagon, however, quickly dispersed them.

Then Frank ran the wagon plumb up to the cavern entrance.

Here it stood with the electric guns pointed ominously out upon the plain. Truly, no light attack could hope to dislodge the wagon from this position.

It looked as if the travelers had much the better of the situation.

"I think we shall succeed in bringing the blacks to terms!" cried Frank. "Perhaps King Corocomo will be glad to treat with us."

"It looks as if he would!" cried Hal; "but I wish my uncle was with us."

"We will try and rescue him," said Frank.

"How?"

"By visiting the plateau. That is the one grand object that I desire."

"But," cried Hal, in astonishment, "how can we ever get the wagon up there?"

"We don't want to."

"What?"

"You shall see. Will you accompany me? We will leave Barney and Pomp to defend the pass."

"Mercy!" exclaimed Jack Fuller. "Do you mean that, Mr. Reade?"

"Of course I do."

"But what can three of us hope to do against such odds as we shall find there?"

"We will not seek open combat. If they attack us we will stand on the defensive. But I am very anxious to see what the plateau is like."

"Well," said Hal, readily, "of course we will go, Frank. But can Barney and Pomp get along alone?"

"I'll risk them. They can hold an army at bay with the electric guns."

"Then it is settled."

"Come below and put on the armor!" said Frank.

"Armor?" exclaimed Hal.

"Yes."

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I say. Come and I will show you."

And Frank led the two bewildered New Yorkers down into the cabin. Here he pushed three long metal boxes from a locker.

Opening them he took out three complete suits of mail, steel linked and neat fitting. They were a beautiful piece of workmanship.

"What do you think of that?" he cried. "Just put one of them on."

Frank suited the action to the word, and began to don one of them himself.

At this Hal and Jack followed his example. In a few moments they were neatly clad in armor.

"Now," cried Frank, "you need not fear the javelins or arrows of the foe. The armor is proof even against rifle balls."

"You don't mean it?" cried Hal, enthusiastically. "Come, then. Let us be off."

The two New Yorkers no longer had any fear of the trip to the plateau. Indeed, they were anxious to court the risk. So the start was made.

Barney and Pomp remained with the machine to hold the Kossongos at bay.

Frank had no means of knowing how many of the foe were left upon the plateau.

But he believed that the majority of the fighting men were on the plain below, and that he would have little trouble with those left above.

So the three explorers proceeded to creep stealthily up through the cavern.

When they had first entered it with the wagon quite a number of the Kossongos had been driven into it.

These might be lurking somewhere in the dark recesses, and Frank understood well the risk.

The cavern led in its winding course upward. Up and up the three explorers went.

All was darkness. Nothing had thus far been seen of the blacks. Reassured, our adventurers pressed on.

After a time a glimmer of light was seen ahead.

It was the light of day, and after some more climbing, the three white men reached the end of the passage.

They emerged upon the plateau, and in the heart of a

clump of palms. What impressed them singularly was the fact that none of the Kossongos were in sight.

Where were they? What was their game, if there was any? Frank asked himself these questions.

The country on the plateau was similar to that below. Indeed, it would never have been suspected that they were above the common level, unless one had visited the cliffs.

Passing through the palms, our adventurers came to a broad and well-trodden path, which seemed to lead into the interior.

The explorers followed it fearlessly.

Suddenly Hal Martin gave a start and a sharp cry.

"Look out!" he ejaculated. "What is that ahead?"

There was a rustling in the palm growth. Suddenly from the shade of some plantains a form leaped forth.

Instinctively all three picked up their rifles. But the alarm was groundless.

The figure was that of a white man.

It was Col. Martin.

With a wild cry of joy he rushed toward them.

"Heaven be praised!" he cried. "At last I am to meet my own kind. My salvation is at hand."

"Uncle!" cried Hal, fulsomely. "Oh, this is great joy!"

The embraced warmly. Then experiences were recounted.

"Yes," declared the colonel, "the best fighting men are down below on the plain. But there are many yet on the plateau."

"How far distant is the village?" asked Frank.

"But a very short distance. Would you like to look at it?"

"Is the risk great?"

"I think not."

Then the colonel looked curiously at them all.

"What is that you have on?" he asked. "It looks like steel armor."

"It is," replied Frank. "Of the best quality and impervious to a rifle ball."

"You don't mean it! Indeed, Mr. Reade, you are a wonderful inventor."

Frank modestly disclaimed this insinuation. But the party all set forward now to take a look at the Kossongo town.

"Was there nobody on guard at the cavern when you came up on to the plateau?"

"Not one," replied Frank.

"That is very curious indeed. There always used to be a number of armed guards."

"Perhaps we demoralized them when we drove them into the cavern with the electric gun."

"Perhaps so."

At this moment the African captive parted the screen of plantains and said:

"Look!"

The scene was a rare one. They were upon the brow of a slight eminence. A green and fertile valley lay below them.

And there were plainly visible a vast collection of negro huts.

Streets were laid out in even order.

This was the plateau retreat of the Kossongos. Surely a more favorable spot could not be imagined.

A large number of the natives were gathered in the central square of the town.

They were in a state of excitement.

They seemed to be holding some sort of a council. One tall and aged chieftain was addressing them.

"That is Mafta, their great prophet," declared Col. Martin. "What he says is law to them."

"It looks as if he were inciting them to war," said Frank.

"Very likely that is the case," agreed the colonel. "At any rate, if we watch long enough, we can tell."

This the explorers intended doing, for it was important to know what their purpose was.

But just at this moment a startling and unlooked-for catastrophe occurred.

CHAPTER XI.

IN CAPTIVITY.

All were so intently watching the blacks that they did not notice anything in the vicinity.

Not until Hal, prompted by some impulse, looked over his shoulder did they realize the proximity of danger.

Then the New Yorker gave a terrified cry.

"The blacks!" he cried. "We are surrounded!"

"We are discovered!" yelled Jack Fuller, dodging behind a plantain.

He was just in time, for a javelin struck the earth where he had stood.

A legion of black forms burst from the palm clumps about and rushed with wild yells upon the white men.

There was no alternative but to flee for their lives.

Frank saw this and shouted:

"Quick—for your lives! Scatter and meet at the wagon!"

This was done.

It was each man for himself.

He made a straight line for a clump of plantains near, but before he reached them black forms closed in upon him.

He was hurled to the earth.

There he was securely held. It was impossible for him to escape. The horrifying reflection dawned upon him that he was a prisoner.

But he was not alone in this mishap. Jack had also run plump into the clutches of the black foe.

Almost before he knew it he was a captive.

And Col. Martin was also captured.

But Frank Reade, Jr., made a desperate run for his life. Fortune favored him.

He reached a high wall of rock and vanished behind it.

There was a narrow lane with palms hedged with hazel.

A black leaped out in his path. The young inventor dashed upon him with the agility of a tiger.

He dodged the deadly javelin and struck the fellow fair between the eyes with his fist. He went down like a log.

Then Frank dodged into the undergrowth.

A dodging, twisting course he ran for several hundred yards. Then, after a time, he became satisfied that he had eluded his pursuers.

He paused in great doubt.

As fortune had it, he had made a straight course for the cavern. He saw its mouth not a hundred yards distant.

And now a great problem confronted him. What should he do?

It was his impulse to remain upon the plateau and strive to rescue his companions.

But if he did this, he would only be incurring a mighty risk. Should his retreat be cut off from the cavern, he would be easily hunted down and caught like a rat in a trap.

What could he hope to do alone against all that vast number of blacks on the plateau?

Whereas, if he returned to the wagon, there was a chance to at least try and bring the foe to terms.

An incident decided his course.

Suddenly he saw a number of black forms running across the ridge toward the cavern's mouth.

He saw their game at once.

This was to reach the mouth of the cavern and guard it so that any of the white men on the plateau might not escape.

If they succeeded in this, Frank knew that his fate was sealed. At once the young inventor acted.

He broke cover and started on a run for the cavern.

The blacks saw him and with mad yells redoubled their efforts.

On ran the young inventor.

Fortunately the blacks had more ground to cover. Frank was a swift runner and made quick time.

He reached the cavern's mouth just in the nick of time.

A javelin struck the rock wall by his head as he dove into the depths. Down he went through the winding passage.

And as he did so he heard the boom of an explosion far below.

"Barney and Pomp are attacked," he reflected; "they must have aid."

A few moments later the daylight of the lower level was visible ahead.

Then he saw the Electric Wagon just ahead. Barney and Pomp were at the electric guns. Just beyond, upon the plain, were the Kossongos coming to the attack.

Barney had fired the gun but once, and it had created havoc in the ranks of the blacks.

Frank sprang upon the deck of the wagon and pressed a secret spring which opened the door.

Barney and Pomp were overjoyed at sight of Frank.

"Golly, Marse Frank," cried Pomp, "yo' am jes' in de nick ob time. Der rapsCALLIONS are comin' fo' us!"

"Bejabbers, it's glad we are to see yez, Misther Frank!" cried Barney. "Phwereiver are the rist av thim?"

"They are captives," replied Frank. "I managed to escape."

Then he told of the incidents on the plateau. Barney and Pomp listened with horror and amazement.

"Shure, we must rescue thim!" cried the Celt.

"That we will endeavor to do, if they are not massacred by the Kossongos," said Frank.

But there was work enough in front now to claim the attention of all.

The Kossongos were coming to the attack with full ranks. Fire was hotly opened upon them.

Before the electric guns they could hope to accomplish but little, however. In a few moments they were compelled to break and fall back, leaving the ground covered with the dead and dying.

In great confusion they retired to the cover of the palm clumps.

Some time passed. They did not seem inclined to return to the attack.

"I rather think we have tamed them," said Frank, triumphantly. "Perhaps the warlike Corocomo may yet find it to his advantage to make terms."

"Look!" cried Barney. "Shure, he's come to that now."

This was true.

From the palm grove two of the blacks were seen advancing with their hands held up in the air in token of truce.

Frank stepped out in front of the wagon to meet them.

One of them advanced and addressed the young inventor in Portuguese.

"King Corocomo sends his greetings to the great white chief," said the fellow.

"You may return the same to your king," said Frank. "What does he wish?"

"He seeks a truce with the white men. If they will go away peaceably he will spare their lives."

Frank was for a moment staggered with the audacity of this proposition. He whistled low and softly.

"Well, that is very generous!" he replied, with sarcasm. "You may return to your king and tell him that your people on the plateau have a number of our people in their power. I demand their release, or I will exterminate every mother's son of you. Go take this to your king."

The emissaries went slowly away. Their announcement evidently did not please the savage king, for angry yells came back on the wind.

By way of reminder of his threats, Frank sent a bomb down into their midst.

It had a salutary effect, for presently the emissaries appeared again. They advanced to within speaking distance, and again opened parley.

"Well?" said Frank, sharply. "What word do you bring now?"

"The king will accept your terms if you will give up one of the white prisoners, that he may be made a sacrifice to the god of the moon."

Frank shivered at the bare idea of such a thing.

"Never!" he exclaimed, vehemently. "All must be delivered up safe and sound, or I will kill every one of you!"

Back to the king went the emissaries. After this all became silent. The Kossongos seemed to have suddenly left the vicinity.

"That is queer!" muttered Frank. "What are they up to?"

Then he fancied that this might be a blind upon the part of the blacks to draw him out of his position.

So he waited where he was, determined not to be so easily duped.

Time passed and Frank began to get nervous.

What did it mean? Had the wretches another method of reaching the plateau? If so, then they certainly would outwit him.

And the fate of the white prisoners would be sealed. It was too horrible a thing to contemplate.

And as he reflected upon it, Frank waxed nervous over the situation.

"Mercy on us!" he exclaimed. "What shall we do? We cannot remain here inactive all the while."

Then darkness was seen to be fast shutting down. Still the Kossongos did not appear.

Frank turned the searchlight, and threw its rays up into the darkness of the cavern.

He considered at that moment the feasibility of blowing out the walls of the aperture, so that the machine might be worked up through it onto the plateau.

The ascent was gradual and shelving. The more he studied it the better satisfied he became of its feasibility.

He resolved to attempt it with light charges of dynamite.

Turning one of the guns upon a distant angle of rock he sent a light charge of dynamite against it.

The result was gratifying.

Enough of the rock was dislodged so that the wagon could have gone ahead quite a distance.

Barney and Pomp, with iron bars, rolled the stones aside.

The passage was full broad enough to admit of this. The difficulty in the passage of the wagon was in the height of the cavern.

The rock being of such soft material as sandstone was cut by the dynamite as if with a knife.

To be sure it involved some expenditure of dynamite, but what was this compared with the exigency and the result gained?

Charge after charge of dynamite was sent into the soft sandstone.

Most of it crumbled to powder. The large fragments were easily rolled aside.

And thus slowly but steadily the wagon made its way upward. All night long the explorers worked.

And still the Kossongos did not make an appearance.

Frank was satisfied that they were making the plateau by some other method. After events proved this true.

Daylight came, and shortly after the last fifty feet of the cavern was blown out and the Electric Wagon had reached the heights of the plateau.

So elated were the three explorers that they could not resist a cheer.

CHAPTER XII.

FATE OF THE ELECTRIC WAGON.

There had been a Kossongo guard at the upper entrance to the cavern.

They now retreated in dismay before the advance of the Electric Wagon. No one was now in sight.

Doubtless they had gone to carry the dismaying news to the Kossongo village. Indeed, this was quickly verified by the distant sound of beating tom-toms.

"Forward!" cried Frank, springing into the wheel-house. "We must make rapid work, or they may kill the prisoners!"

Forward shot the Electric Wagon.

The Kossongo village was in a state of fearful uproar. The warriors could be seen deploying in lines, under the direction of King Corocomo and the Prophet Mafta.

In the center of the town a high dais had been raised. Upon this was a tall stake, and to it was bound a white man.

It was Hal Martin!

The Celt seized his rifle and sprang to a forward loop hole.

It was certain that the superstitious fiends meant to kill Hal. Already the executioner with his bloody knife stood over the youth.

Already the knife was in the air. Barney muttered a prayer and pulled the trigger of his rifle.

Crack!

It was just in the nick of time.

The black fiend threw up his arms and fell dead. Hal Martin's life was saved.

Another black sprang upon the dais, but Pomp brought him down. Then Frank sent an electric bolt into the throng.

It created fearful havoc.

Dozens of wretches were slaughtered. The wagon went down into the throng like a thunderbolt.

Appalled and completely dismayed the blacks fled. In less time than it takes to tell it the whole town was evacuated.

Barney leaped from the wagon and rushed upon the dais. He cut Hal Martin's bonds. The Young New Yorker cried:

"Thank God! you came just in time!"

"Shure, sor, and where are the others?" asked Barney.

"They are lying bound hand and foot in that hut yonder," replied Hal.

Barney rushed into the hut. A moment later Jack and Col. Martin, liberated, came out with him.

All were quickly on board the wagon. It was a sweeping and glorious victory.

But to clinch it, fire was at once set to the combustibles.

hatch of the huts. In a brief space of time the native village was in a fair way to destruction.

This broke the heart of the Kossongo king.

All his former defiance vanished, and he became humble and penitent enough. His warriors were scattered, and the struggle for the hill of ivory was over.

Frank Reade, Jr., with his Electric Wagon, had triumphed. It was not long before an envoy from Corocoma made his appearance.

This time he came in a supplicating mood. Frank received him kindly, and said:

"Tell your king that all this might have been spared had he treated me rightly in the first place. We are glad to have peace."

Next the king himself, a tall, powerful savage, appeared.

He threw himself upon his face before Frank as an evidence of his acknowledgment of his foe's superiority.

Terms were quickly made.

It was agreed that the white men should have the hill of ivory by paying for it in various gifts of cloth and utensils to be brought from the coast later.

As an evidence of his intention to renounce the superstitious ceremony of placing tusks upon the tomb of the dead monarch, the king himself descended and removed some of them.

"Now, boys," declared Frank, "you have received your fortune and your rights to it. All depends upon your ability to get the ivory to market."

"Leave that to us!" cried Col. Martin. "Indeed, Mr. Reade, we cannot sufficiently acknowledge our gratitude to you."

"Do not speak of it," said Frank. "Indeed, I am only too glad to be able to help you."

"We will set out at once for St. Paul de Loando and get a caravan to help transport it."

At that moment an astounding spectacle burst upon the view of all.

At the lower end of the plateau suddenly a party of white men came into view.

They were at the moment upon the plateau.

The newcomers had doubtless found their way up through the cavern.

At sight of the Electric Wagon the newcomers halted in amazement.

There were fully a hundred armed white men in the group.

One who seemed to be the leader put his hands trumpet-like to his mouth and gave a halloo.

"Hello!" shouted Frank, in reply.

"Who are you?"

"Explorers from the United States. Who are you?"

"English ivory hunters from St. Paul de Loando."

"We have discovered a mighty pile of ivory below there!" said Leslie Carter, the leader. "And we are looking for the owners."

"They are here," said Frank, indicating Hal and Jack.

The English captain kicked the turf a moment thoughtfully with his boot toe.

"What are you going to do with it?" he asked, finally.

"Transport it to St. Paul de Loanda."

"Where is your caravan?"

"I have thought of making it up from the ranks of these Kossongos."

But the English captain shook his head.

"I have a proposition to make."

"What is it?"

"You will be to no end of trouble to rig up a caravan in St. Paul. Stand in with us, pay us well, and we will handle your ivory for you."

With quick impulse Hal replied:

"That settles it. I will take your offer!"

The matter was settled at once. A paper was drawn up by Frank Reade, Jr., which all signed.

Then all went down to the plain below. Frank left Barney and Pomp with the Electric Wagon.

The caravan was quickly encamped about the hill of ivory. The work of numbering and classifying the tusks began.

Before nightfall every ox and every negro was loaded with the ivory and ready to start for the coast. Hal and Jack and Col. Martin were in high spirits.

All were gathered at the base of the plateau, just in the edge of the evening, when Frank said:

"I don't believe you will need our services any longer, Hal. I believe Barney and Pomp and I will go along."

But the words had scarcely been spoken when a startling sound reached the hearing of all.

It came from the plateau above. It was the crack of rifles and yell of savage blacks.

"What does that mean?" asked Hal.

All knew that Barney and Pomp were up there with the machine. Frank did not fear for them.

The wagon had been kept there, with the guns covering the village to overawe the Kossongos.

A hundred armed white men were at once rallied under Captain Carter. All had started on the run for the cavern entrance when a great cry escaped the lips of Hal Martin.

"My God! What is that?"

Out over the verge of the precipice shot a huge black body. Out into the air it sprang.

Down it came like a thunderbolt all that long ways.

It struck the ground with an awful crash. Then there was an awful explosion, like an earthquake.

Nearly every man was thrown from his feet. When they recovered a mighty yawning pit was seen, but nothing else, save a few bits of debris scattered about.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE END.

The reader, no doubt, has guessed the meaning of this incident. The huge black object which shot over the edge of the cliff was the Electric Wagon.

The explosion was caused by the awful concussion given the dynamite stored aboard the wagon.

The spectators had one dim and horrified recollection.

To the framework of the wagon there had clung a dozen black forms. These had, with the wagon, disappeared.

Scarce a fragment of them could be found.

But Frank had no thought of this, or of the loss of the wagon. He only gave a gasping cry.

"Oh, my God! What of Barney and Pomp?"

There were fragments of the wagon scattered over a large area of ground. Certainly not enough of it could ever be found to be of value.

It was a stunning catastrophe, and for a moment Frank Reade, Jr., was too appalled to act.

Then Captain Carter suggested:

"Suppose we go up on the plateau and satisfy ourselves that they are not there?"

"Right," replied Frank. "That is the proper move."

So all at once started for the plateau. The time consumed in reaching it was short.

It required but a few moments of time to afford a complete revelation of the whole affair.

Reaching the spot where the wagon had been, to the surprise of all, Barney and Pomp were found, bound hand and foot, and lying on the ground.

The joy of Frank and the others was so great at finding them unharmed that for a time no questions were asked.

The two prisoners were liberated, and then at the first opportunity told their story.

Not apprehending any attack from the blacks, both had been busily at work upon some of the machinery, when suddenly Barney felt himself seized from behind.

In a jiffy both were made prisoners by a dozen howling Kossongos who had unobserved boarded the wagon.

They were bound hand and foot and thrown out upon the ground. Then the Kossongos proceeded to take possession of the wagon.

All had gone well until one of them had accidentally run across the motor lever in the wheel house.

In a moment the current was on, and away started the wagon.

In vain the blacks clung to it.

It carried them over the plateau with the result which the reader has seen.

The Electric Wagon was past redemption. Frank Reade, Jr.'s wonderful invention was gone forever.

Naturally the spirits of all were considerably depressed. But there was no way but to make the best of it.

So Frank Reade, Jr., Barney and Pomp accompanied the caravan to the coast. At St. Paul they chartered a sailing vessel to take them up to the spot where they were to meet the Sierra Leone.

They took a warm farewell of Hal and Jack. A few weeks later, on board the Sierra Leone, they were homeward bound.

In due course of time New York was safely reached and finally Readestown. Friends gladly welcomed them home.

But Frank Reade, Jr., was not wholly satisfied.

Those few weeks adrift in Central Africa had only whetted his desire for another trip, and new plans began at once to mature in his fertile brain.

Hal Martin and Jack Fuller returned home a few years later, made immensely wealthy in the ivory trade. Happiness and prosperity became their lot.

And this brings our story of wild adventures in Central Africa to

THE END.

Read "FRANK READE, JR.'S SEARCH FOR A LOST MAN IN HIS LATEST AIR WONDER," which will be the next number (31) of "Frank Reade Weekly Magazine."

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